

How do we say future?

Tools, approaches, and languages for transformative urban futures

Thematic group Urban Futures workshop

AESOP TG Urban Futures workshop, 2-4 February 2026, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University Istanbul, Turkey

Workshop theme: How do we say future?

Multiple, interconnected challenges are unfolding simultaneously. Climate change, environmental degradation, technological shifts, rapid urbanisation, migration, and geopolitical instability are reshaping cities and urban life. **Planners play a crucial role in co-shaping urban futures through transformative action that address today's rapidly evolving needs while safeguarding the needs of future generations.** This task is complicated by the unpredictability and uncontrollability of current challenges, whose outcomes are difficult—if not impossible—to anticipate or steer.

Nevertheless, **a growing response in planning and related disciplines is indeed futuring: practices that create futures by exploring how today's challenges might evolve and – not least – what kinds of urban futures we desire.** In recent workshops of the TG Urban Futures, and during the AESOP 2025 Congress in Istanbul, the question “Who says future?” sparked rich discussions. These also touched on an equally pressing question: **“How do we say future?” The way we envision and narrate futures is shaped not only by who is involved, but also by which types of tools and approaches we use, from which disciplines they originate, and for what purposes we use them.**

An important dimension of ‘how do we say future’ is the general approach or vision that is adopted towards the future - expressed in questions like

- Do we seek to predict, or to imagine?
- Do we need new approaches and tools?
- Do we need a new kind of “advocate planner”—one who not only amplifies voices in shaping futures but also develops new literacies to articulate them?
- Do we need to develop a new vocabulary to capture different, more transformational futures and make them operational?
- Which forms of knowledge—and whose knowledge—are included?
- How do we connect past, present, and future in our work?
- A recent aspect comes from discussions about artificial intelligence and its impacts on academic and professional practices. What might a “map of AI” for urban futures look like?

The focus on ‘how do we say future’ remains inevitably related to ‘who says future’, because the tools and approaches we use, and their purposes are developed with an audience in mind.

Scholars and practitioners with an interest in futuring and futuring approaches from diverse disciplines such as urban planning, architecture, visual arts, sociology, literature, communication, and technology are warmly invited to participate.

Submit your application by 29 October 2025 (more information below): [submission form](#)

Workshop location and format

From 2–4 February 2026 in Istanbul, Turkey, the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, in collaboration with the AESOP Thematic Group Urban Futures, will organise a three-day workshop to address these questions.

Participants will engage in various workshop formats, supported by local mentors and working in smaller groups, to develop and propose new and creative futuring approaches for a local case of sea-level rise in Istanbul's old town. Participants will have the opportunity to contribute futuring approaches they are familiar with, or interested in, and to learn from others.

As an outcome of the workshop, the question “How do we say future?” will be examined in depth, and alternative methodologies, approaches, and toolkits for both global and local contexts will be explored.

Roundtable discussions will be organised for interdisciplinary debates, and new creative approaches will be encouraged through keynotes and mentor sessions to provide a unifying platform. The meeting, enriched by the sharing of experiences related to local expertise, will feature presentations on the practices of the Marmara Municipalities Union, of which Istanbul is also a member city (<https://www.marmara.gov.tr/en>).

How to participate

The workshop focuses on generating ideas and achieving results in a short period of time. The workshop will accommodate a maximum of 30 participants. To ensure diversity in groups and facilitate a fair selection process, **candidates are expected to submit online a brief professional account (Google Form), a short motivation (300 words) of why they plan to participate, and finally an extended abstract (1500 words, references not included).**

The **extended abstract shall combine a reflection on ‘futuring’ with actual research interests, chosen theories or concepts, methodological approaches.** In our own reflections (Ache 2017) on a planners’ role, futuring will be less of an issue of ‘control the future’ but rather instead to ‘midwife the future’ (Ganis 2015). Instead of knowing the exact outcomes in advance to implement a future according to ‘plan’, we might rather be looking into trajectories and possibilities (Hillier & Healey 2008). Instead of owning the future as experts with capacity to control, for instance legally, the role changes towards stewardship and place “becomes a ‘participant’ in the ‘flow of action’ and entrusts the design professional to deliver a relevant place. As such, control of the future implies that there is a fixed expectation for a place and midwifery of the future implies that there is no fixed expectation for a place; rather, the place becomes what it needs to be.” (Ganis 2015, p. 4)

Early career scholars and practitioners are highly encouraged to apply, as participants are not expected to be seasoned experts regarding the futuring topics they have an interest in.

The organizers plan to document the workshop results in an edited publication (with ISBN), combining group work products, expert reflections, and the individual extended abstracts coming from participants (in revised form).

The submission form and the up-load of the extended abstract can be accessed via this [link](#)

The deadline for submission is 29 October 2025

Programme

- Day 1 (2 February, 9:30-18:00): welcome and opening of the workshop, keynote speech, site visit to the coastal area of the old town (case study location)
- Day 2 (3 February, 9:30-18:00): panel with invited professionals, introduction to the groups and roundtable format, parallel sessions of the groups with short presentations of every participant to get to know each other's futuring interests and experience, workshop about the local case
- Day 3 (4 February, 9:30-17:00): Final proposals of the participant groups for the local case (Toolkits for the local case and further reflection on how do we say future?), short presentation of each group and closing panel session.

The programme may be subject to change. A detailed, final programme will be published closer to the start of the workshop

Timeline

- Submission of application form deadline: 29 October 2025
 - Notification of acceptance: early December (accepted contributors will receive further information about registration and others shortly after the notification of acceptance)
 - Workshop: 2-4 February 2026
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Participation fee

Participation is free of charge. The organisation does not offer financial support for travel or accommodation.

Organisation and contact

The event is organised by Melih Birik and Bahar Aksel from the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University Istanbul, Turkey (local organising team) and Manuel Caldeira (Leipzig Graduate School of Management) Germany together with the coordinators of the AESOP thematic group on Urban Futures, Peter Ache (Prof em. Radboud University, Netherlands) and Thomas Machiels (University of Antwerp, Belgium).

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